

LEAD Educator



CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING PREVENTION PROGRAM

WINTER 2004

MISSION STATEMENT

The LEAD Educator is a quarterly publication of the Long Beach Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.

Our goal is to provide news and information about childhood lead poisoning prevention measures for parents, childcare providers and the medical community.

In addition, we provide current information on lead poisoning screening and legislative measures.

NEWS

Mexican pottery exposes family to lead

Pictures 1 and 2 are samples of traditional hand made Mexican cooking pottery that is often glazed with toxic lead compounds. Generations of Mexican and Central-American families have unknowingly used lead-glazed pottery to make traditional foods.

Although, such practices are limited to few households, it is important to inform everyone about the dangers of imported Mexican cooking pottery. The following case study involved three lead poisoned children and their mother. Names used in this article are fictitious in order to protect the privacy of those involved.



When Mrs. López immigrated with her children earlier this year, she was determined to start a new life and leave behind all that had come before her. She never imagined that her past business dealings would surface here in Long Beach where she currently resides. When she took her children for a check up, a routine blood lead test revealed that her children ages 14, 13 and 12 had elevated blood lead levels of 31, 38.5 and 35 µg/dL respectively.

In her native *Patámbaro*, State of Michoacán (México), Mrs. López ran a small business producing clay pottery. The family business was operated from home; the children were often involved in the pottery making process. Mrs. López specialized in plates and small bowls, picture 3.

After subsequent interviews with the Public Health Nurse assigned to the case, it was learned that Mrs. López used a lead-based glaze known as "*greta*" (lead oxide), to coat the inside and outside of the pottery. *Greta* comes in a bright yellow to orange powder that easily dissolves in water and is applied directly to clay pottery before the firing process. Mrs. López recalls the sweet choking smell and the stained hands from using *greta*, but was not aware of the dangers nor was she aware of lead poisoning. Unfortunately, most self-taught potters like Mrs. López have used *greta* for many years without any protection. It is likely they will continue to use *greta* because it is readily available and it is inexpensive, selling for as little as one dollar per pound. Mexican government efforts to replace *greta* with non-toxic substitute are now starting but face strong opposition from those potters who are not aware of the risks involved.



Latino Diabetes Program in Long Beach

The Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services has received a grant from the California Endowment to implement a diabetes prevention program targeting the Latino community. Research at the national and state level point to a disproportionate number of Latinos with diabetes but few advocacy programs. The Latino Diabetes Program targets low-income, Spanish Speaking adults with diabetes and their family members. Members receive free-of-cost, culturally sensitive education and social support program that includes a glucose monitoring machine and a nutrition consultation. The program works in collaboration with local clinics, physicians, and community agencies to promote and refer participants to the program. For registration and program information contact Verónica Sepulveda-Trigueros, Program Coordinator at (562) 570-4159.

National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week 2003 Outreach Results:

Sponsored Events:

21

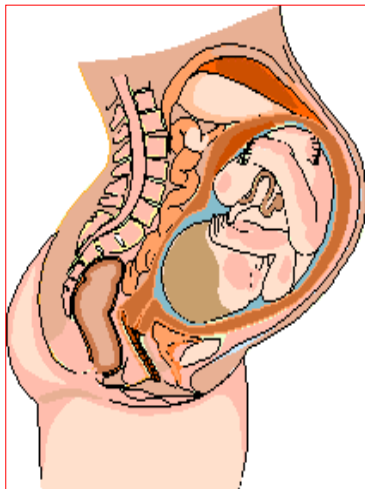
Total individuals provided with Lead Presentation 101:

488

Educational Flyers Distributed:

6000

Pica Behavior and Pregnancy



Although the exact numbers of pregnant women with elevated blood-lead levels (EBLLs) is unknown, pica behavior has been noted in several studies of pregnant women with EBLLs. Pica, the compulsive ingestion of non-food items is a worldwide phenomenon that has been practiced for centuries for a variety of reasons.

Non-food substances that are ingested by individuals include: dirt, clay, chalk, cigarette ashes, sand, soil, paint, plaster, gravel, rocks, starch etc. It is believed that pica is the body's response to a mineral deficiency, such as low calcium. In Nigeria for example, the ingestion of clay by pregnant women is not only practiced but also encouraged, as clay is rich in calcium. Other cultures consume clay for religious or medicinal purposes.

However, such behavior is harmful not only to the pregnant woman but to her unborn child for many reasons, including lead poisoning. Laura L. Jelliffe-Pawłowski, PhD et al., researcher with the California Department of Health Services, Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch is involved with a pilot study of EBLLs among pregnant women and their children.

At the 131st Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA), Pawłowski PhD, presented some preliminary findings. Between 1992 and 2002, 43 cases of childhood lead poisoning were studied; pica behavior was identified as the primary source in all of these. Most of these involved Hispanic women living in Los Angeles County (42 cases). The reasons given for the pica behavior was having "learned it" typically "in Mexico" or having "craved" the substance. There were other sources noted including the age of the housing with the majority of homes built before 1980. This study highlights the importance of understanding specific cultural practices and pica as a contributing source of lead poisoning in pregnancy.



Here in Long Beach, the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program received a case involving a young immigrant mother whose EBLL was confirmed at 40.5 µg/dL postpartum. The, newborn EBLL was confirmed at 24.7 µg/dL in late October.

A follow-up home visit with Public Health Nurse (PHN) and Registered Environmental Health Specialist found no environmental source of lead poisoning involving paint, dust or soil. However, mother did confirm with PHN that she had been ingesting a pottery cup made in Mexico, similar to picture at left.

The PHN provided her with an educational intervention and instructed her to stop ingesting the cup. In addition, her clinician advised her not to breastfeed her newborn. Unfortunately, the pottery cup in question was not tested because the mother had consumed the remaining cup fragments. The case is currently closed due to mother having traveled to Mexico because of a family emergency.

Childhood Lead Poisoning Report

Current Open Cases Under Management:

100+

New Lead Cases For (Aug-Dec, 2003):

11

CHDP Provider PM 160 Lead Report (July 03 to Nov 03)

No. of 1-2 year old children visits:

2772

No. of 1-6 year old children tested for lead:

486

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For additional information, please call the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at (562) 570-4203 or (562) 570-4083 (Spanish)

Medi-Cal and Healthy Families

Call: (562) 570-8770

Or

1 (800) 832-2307

INFORMATION ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

California Department of Health Services
<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/childlead/>

Alliance for Healthy Homes
<http://www.afhh.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/lead.htm>

T.D.D. (562) 570-4230

This document is available in an alternative format by request:
(562) 570-4083